

**Testimony offered to the
House Education Committee
February 8, 2006**

High School Graduation Requirements and HB 5606

Representative Palmer, Representative Miller, and members of the House Education Committee, we come before you today to explain the position of the **Macomb County Superintendents and the School Boards Association** regarding high school graduation requirements as identified in House Bill 5606. Please do not interpret our presence today as opposition. We are here to express our support for increased rigor and expectations for Michigan high school graduates. We are asking you to consider implementation timelines in the spirit of making this work for all students.

We have brought you our position in a portfolio that contains the data we collected when analyzing the impact of the State Board's proposal. We looked at what our districts were currently requiring and found we were not too far away from the State Board proposal. We looked at what our students were currently taking and found that 81% of the Class of 2005 took three or more years of math and 65% took three or more years of science. However, even with being that close to the State Board recommendation and to the requirements in HB 5606, we still have concerns with the scope of the proposal and the speed of implementation.

Specifically, we are asking that the requirements of Algebra II and Chemistry or Physics for all students be delayed for two years (effective for the Class of 2012). This time will enable teachers to become proficient, through intensive professional development, in a variety of instructional strategies, not just those that work with and for the strong and confident math and science students who take the course now. It will allow districts time to provide appropriate facilities for lab courses such as chemistry and physics. Two years would provide time for schools to develop, budget for and institute the student support programs, such as after school tutoring, parent workshops, and/or summer programs, programs necessary to insure that all kids have the resources to be successful in the higher level courses. It will also enable our higher ed colleagues to recruit and certify the additional math and science teachers we are going to need to meet both the state requirements and the federal requirements regarding highly qualified teachers. We have calculated that the 28 comprehensive high schools in Macomb County alone will need 70 additional math teachers three years from this fall; project those numbers across the entire state and the need for the time becomes clear.

We support the exclusion of the world language requirement in HB 5606, not because we do not see the value of being bilingual in this global economy, but because we believe that 18 credits in required courses threaten a student's ability to choose a different path. Included with our materials is a folder showing the wide variety of high quality career and technical courses available to all students in Macomb County, regardless of district of residence. The Macomb community has made a serious investment in CTE programs which serve so many students that preserving student opportunities is a priority. For this reason we applaud the provision that enables students entering high school to elect an alternate curriculum, not forcing students to wait until after the 11th grade to modify the requirements.

Finally, we would encourage you to resist the temptation and the pressure to rush this mandate. There are several pieces of data in our materials that support that recommendation. First, despite having a single state requirement for graduation, Michigan students *consistently* score above the national average in every single subject area and the composite score. We are not as woefully behind other states as one might think; as a matter of fact, the Michigan State Board recommendation goes farther and faster than any other state, including those with whom we consulted. Second, if the goal is to increase the number of college graduates in the state, thus offering a better prepared workforce, the state University Presidents' Council report nine consecutive years of increased college enrollment. Further evidence is found in the summary of the Macomb five-year follow-up survey we did with the graduates of the Class of 2000. Five years out of high school, 49% of those students report that they have already earned a bachelors degree or above.

Let me close with this thought: If this recommendation is worth being written into law, and the Macomb superintendents and school boards believe that it is, then it is worth being done right the first time. Nothing threatens an ambitious plan more than the false start. We are asking you to pass legislation that presents a thoughtful, coordinated and timely implementation plan. If that's done, we are confident that the future we all envision will be realized.

Presented by

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